

# The INQUIRER

£1

the voice of British and Irish Unitarians and Free Christians [www.inquirer.org.uk](http://www.inquirer.org.uk)  
Issue 7811 2 February 2013

*Was  
his  
Jesus'  
wife?*



PROCESSED

FEB 07 2013

GTU LIBRARY



# The INQUIRER

THE UNITARIAN AND FREE CHRISTIAN PAPER

*Established 1842*

The Inquirer is the oldest

Nonconformist religious newspaper

**"To promote a free and inquiring religion through the worship of God and the celebration of life; the service of humanity and respect for all creation; and the upholding of the liberal Christian tradition."**

*From the Object passed at the  
General Assembly of the Unitarian and  
Free Christian Churches 2001*

The Inquirer is published fortnightly by The Inquirer Publishing Company (2004), Registered Charity 1101039.

**Editor** M Colleen Burns MA

46A Newmarket Road

Cringleford

Norwich NR4 6UF

ph: 01603 505281

e: [inquirer@btinternet.com](mailto:inquirer@btinternet.com)

**Copyeditor** Sarah Reynolds

**Cover** *Mary Magdalene* by Andrea Solari via Wikimedia Commons

**Articles** express the views of their authors. Submissions are welcome and may be edited for content and length. They should be emailed or typed and should be the author's original work or be attributed appropriately.

**Subscribe** Annual subscriptions are £35 with discounts for bulk orders. Cheques payable to 'The Inquirer'. Write to Lorna Hill

24 Lodge Lane

Keymer, Hassocks

West Sussex, BN6 8NA

ph: 01273 844940

e: [inquirersubs@gmail.com](mailto:inquirersubs@gmail.com)

**Advertise** for £6 per column cm, on 3-col page, plus VAT or £7.50 per col cm, on a 2-col page. A one-page supplement is £200. One column on a 2-col page is £100, on a 3-col page, £75. A5 fliers may be inserted for £70 plus VAT. Contact the editor for details.

**Births, marriages and deaths** are 50p a word plus VAT.

**Find out more** about Unitarians

[www.unitarian.org.uk](http://www.unitarian.org.uk)

or email [info@unitarian.org.uk](mailto:info@unitarian.org.uk)

The General Assembly, Essex Hall

1-6 Essex Street

London WC2R 3HY

ph: 0207 2402384

## Inquiring Words *A Prayer for Desert Times*

The journeys of our lives are never fully charted. There come to each of us deserts to cross – barren stretches – where the green edge on the horizon may be our destination, or an oasis on our way, or a mirage that beckons only to leave us lost.

When fear grips the heart, or despair bows the head, may we bend as heart and head lead us down to touch the ground beneath our feet. May we scoop some sand into our hands and receive what the sand would teach us:

It holds the warmth of the sun when the sun has left our sight, as it holds the cool of the night when the stars have faded. Hidden among its grains are tiny seeds, at rest and waiting, dormant yet undefeated.

Desert flowers. They endure. Moistened by our tears and by the rains which come to end even the longest drought, they send down roots and they bloom.

May we believe in those seeds, and in the seeds within us.

May we remember in our dry seasons that we, too, are desert flowers. Amen.

– Margaret A Keip

### Editor's view

## Tell us what you think

Part 2 of David Usher's William Ellery Channing lecture appears on page 8 of this issue of *The Inquirer*. David recently delivered the lecture at Golders Green Unitarian Church. It is a challenging piece, a call to action to build the Unitarian movement in different ways. It will not be easy reading for some, but it is evident that David has given a great deal of thought to how he believes Unitarians can survive and thrive.

I published it in the hope that it will start some good discussions. So, if you have some ideas about what David wants to do – or if you to take issue with what he has written – please send in a letter to the editor. Submissions can be sent to [inquirer@btinternet.com](mailto:inquirer@btinternet.com) or posted to 46a Newmarket Road, Cringleford, NORWICH NR4 6UF. Please include your postal address and telephone number for verification purposes.

If you missed part 1, you may order an electronic copy by emailing [inquirer@btinternet.com](mailto:inquirer@btinternet.com)

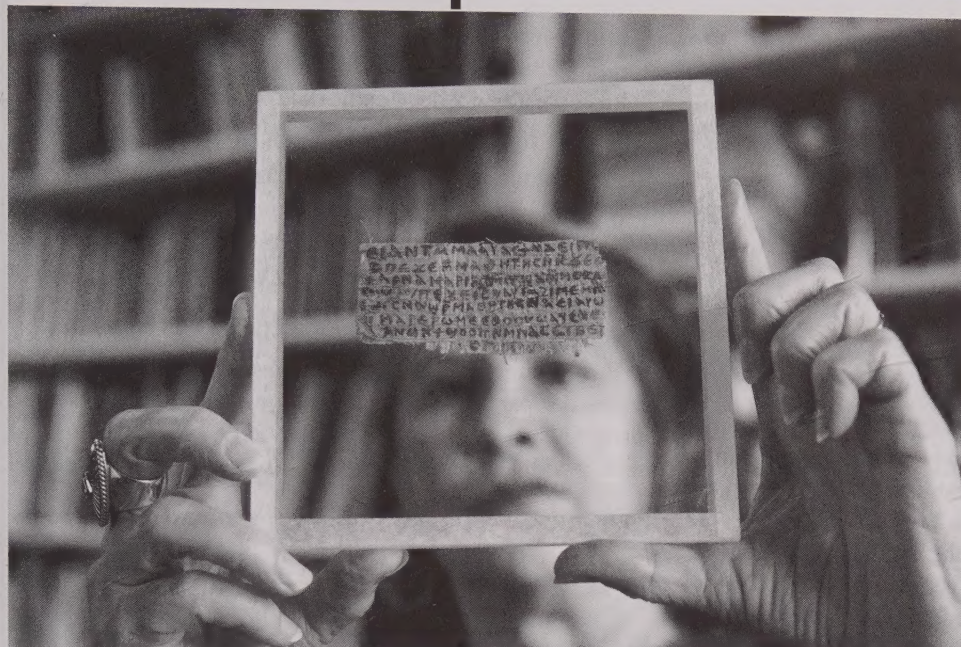
– MC Burns



Follow @The\_\_Inquirer (two underscores) on Twitter. A little shot of Unitarian news and faith in 140 characters. <https://twitter.com/>



# The Gospel of Jesus' wife?



*Professor Karen King holds the controversial fragment which she believes was written in the 4th century. She has delayed publication of a paper on the fragment for further study after allegations that it is a forgery.*

*Photo courtesy of Harvard*

Although some consider a recently discovered 4<sup>th</sup> Century fragment said to indicate that Jesus was married a hoax, **Martin Pulbrook** contends Jesus was married and the papyrus merely supports other compelling proof.

Professor Karen King, Hollis Professor of Divinity in the University of Harvard obtained a fragment of papyrus when the owner – who remains anonymous – sought a translation. It was acquired in 1997 with other papyri; and what seems to have prompted the approach to Karen King was a note accompanying the papyrus saying it was ‘the sole example of a (scriptural) text in which Jesus claims (to have) a wife’.

King’s assessment, after she examined the fragment with the help of other experts, is a model of academic scepticism: ‘She repeatedly cautioned that this fragment should not be taken as proof that Jesus, the historical person, was actually married. “The text was probably written centuries after Jesus lived, and all other early, historically reliable Christian literature is silent on the question,” she said ... “But the discovery is exciting,” King said, “Because it is the first known statement from antiquity that refers to Jesus speaking of a wife” (Laurie Goodstein, in a report for NBC News *Historian says piece of papyrus refers to Jesus’ wife*, 18 September 2012).

King made her findings public just before travelling to Rome to deliver a paper to the International Congress of Coptic Studies outlining the details contained in the papyrus. King’s paper was to have been published in the January edition of the Harvard Theological Review. But she has subsequently withdrawn her piece, pending further study of the papyrus.

Various critics have cast doubt on the authenticity of the fragment. These include Andrew Brown in two articles in the *Guardian* (21 September and 16 October, 2012) and Prof

Francis Watson of Durham in an online article *The Gospel of Jesus’ Wife: How a fake Gospel-Fragment was composed* (21st/26th September 2012).

Consequently, the theologian Bart D Ehrman wrote in the *Irish Examiner* on 17 December 2012 that ‘most experts on early Christianity have come to think the fragment is a hoax, a forgery produced in recent years by an amateur’. I am not so sure. Prof Watson suggests that certainty would come only from scientific examination of the papyrus and its contents. That is clearly the correct way forward. In the meantime I am inclined to regard the fragment as genuine. Even if it turns out to be a hoax, the fragment does not say anything entirely new. And what it does say harmonises entirely with what I believe is the actual position.

The fragment is very small – just less than two inches by just over three – and it contains no complete sentences. Eight separate ideas or phrases are distinguishable on the main side of the papyrus, and a mere three, amounting to only five words in total, on the more damaged reverse side. I shall look at these 11 ideas or phrases.

First something fundamental needs to be said about Professor King’s approach, which is flawed in at least two respects. She observes, ‘The text (of the fragment) was probably written centuries after Jesus lived’ – as though this has the remotest relevance to whether the information in that text is true. This is a common misconception. Let me give two examples from pagan Classical literature. A large part of the *Annals* of the Roman historian Tacitus depends on an 11th-century manuscript; and the poetic collection *Silvae*, by the Roman poet Statius, depends on a 15th-century manuscript. This lateness may lead to corruption of the text thereby transmitted. But there can be no question of the originality of these works as having been written by Tacitus and Statius respectively.

Secondly, King states, ‘all other early, historically reliable Christian literature is silent on the question (of Jesus having a wife)’. She hereby reveals herself as a prisoner to the conventional establishment view of the supremacy of the New

*(Continued on next page)*



# New Testament not the last word

(Continued from previous page)

Testament books – and of the corollary that extra-canonical scriptural works are intrinsically ‘second-class’ and need an apologia if we are to take their evidence seriously.

I suggest the New Testament books should be treated with caution, as they contain many fallacies and inaccuracies. And, we need to evaluate extra-canonical scripture objectively, as potentially containing information which could, on occasion, correct the New Testament. Based on my research, I have long believed the answer to the question ‘Was Jesus married?’ is ‘yes he was’. The evidence comes mainly from extra-canonical scripture. Nothing in the new fragment comes as a surprise to me; for it fits completely with my position. I have no hesitation in saying that the information in the newly-available fragment is true and genuine – even if the fragment itself is a forgery.

This brings us to a third area where Professor King’s approach is inadequate. Laurie Goodstein, in the NBC News report quotes King saying: ‘The discovery could reignite the debate over whether Jesus was married (and) whether Mary Magdalene was his wife ... These debates date to the early centuries of Christianity.’ But to see this – and other evidence – in terms of a ‘debate’ is simply misguided. It avoids the potentially awkward need to make choices in the realm of fact. In the end, is something true and right, or is it false and wrong?

Let me give a modern illustration. Suppose recent records were lost, so we had limited information about Ronald Reagan, alleged to have been president of the United States. Then, say, a newspaper cutting was discovered in which Mr Reagan seemed to refer to ‘my wife Nancy’. It would be perverse in the extreme to interpret this cutting as evidence of a ‘debate whether Mr Reagan was married’. Either the cutting relates true fact or the cutting is mistaken and the information provided is false.

Crucially, we have to make a choice. And the difficulty, where the new papyrus is concerned, is that ‘making a choice’ involves acknowledging the possibility that the New Testament record is misleading – something that those in the mainstream cannot bring themselves to do. Therefore the issue is fudged, and we are left with the unsatisfactory suggestion of a debate where opposites can co-exist – rather than one of them having to yield.

## Transcript of the text

The eight lines of text, which are cut off at both ends, have been translated by King and other Coptic experts and posted on the Harvard Divinity School website are:

- 1) ... not [to] me, my mother gave to me life
- 2) The disciples said to Jesus, ...
- 3) ... deny. Mary is worthy of it ... (or, alternatively, Mary is not worthy of it ...)
- 4) ... Jesus said to them, ‘My wife ...
- 5) ... she will be able to be my disciple ...
- 6) Let wicked people swell up ...
- 7) As for me. I dwell with her in order to ...
- 8) ... an image ...

And then there are the three fragments on the reverse, which are:

- 9) ... my moth(er)...
- 10) ... three ...
- 11) ... forth which ...

Not too much can be made of fragments 2 and 9 (‘The disci-

ples said to Jesus’ and ‘my mother’). Presumably Jesus is talking in the latter case, but without any hint of what is actually said here, we are at a dead end. And the same applies with 2.

## Jesus’ reply is Gospel-like

But at least we are dealing on the reasonable assumption that Jesus replies to the disciples, with a Gospel-like text, since Jesus tells the disciples Thomas, Matthew and Philip in the *Pistis Sophia* (a Gnostic text found in 1773) that they should create a record of his ‘deeds and words’ – the Gospels were the result.

Fragment 10, the word “three”, is incomprehensible by itself. But in circumstances where Jesus’ mother and wife are mentioned separately in the papyrus, we should bear in mind Gnostic Gospel of Philip 32 ‘[The] three women who kept company with [Jesus] at all times ... his sister, his mother and

(Continued on next page)

## Glossary of relevant extra-canonical scriptural works

**Pistis Sophia** (Greek for ‘Wisdom = Faith’ or ‘If you know, you will believe’) A group of books, surviving in Coptic and dating from the 3rd century, consisting of discussions between Jesus and various disciples. First translated into English in 1896.

### Gospel of Philip

According to the *Pistis Sophia*, one of the three original Gospels of Christianity, the others being *Thomas* and *Matthew*. All three were written in ‘sayings’ form in Hebrew then translated into Greek, then into Coptic. A Coptic text was discovered at Nag Hammadi in the 1940s, and this was first made available in English translation in 1962. The Gospel has 127 ‘sayings’ (or sections).

### Gospel of Thomas

See above. *Thomas* has 114 ‘sayings’. As with *Philip*, *Thomas* was first recovered complete in Coptic in the 1940s (fragments in Greek had been known, though not identified, earlier). *Thomas* was first translated into English in 1960.

### Dialogue of the Saviour

Questions and answers between Jesus and Mary Magdalene, Judas, Thomas and Matthew, surviving in 104 ‘sayings’. The text is badly damaged in places. Survives in Coptic from Nag Hammadi, and was first made available in English in 1977.

### Book of Thomas

A short book ascribed to Thomas of revelations from Jesus and ‘sayings’. From Nag Hammadi (Coptic text). First made available in English in 1974.

### Gospel of Bartholomew

Questions and answers (sometimes for this reason known as *Questions of Bartholomew*) between Jesus and Bartholomew surviving in Greek, Latin and Coptic versions. English translation in Hennecke-Schneemelcher *New Testament Apocrypha*, Vol.1, 1991, pp.540-551.

### Gospel of the Egyptians

A small number of fragments survive, having been quoted by Clement of Alexandria and others. May have shared certain elements with the early (i.e. pre-New Testament) *Mark* tradition. English translations of the fragments in *Hennecke-Schneemelcher*, Vol.1 (as above), pp.209-211. These surviving fragments mostly involve observations by Jesus on marriage and children.

– Martin Pulbrook



# Marriage spoken of elsewhere

his companion, were all called "Mary".

Fragments 3 and 5 ('Mary is not worthy of it' and 'she will be able to be my disciple') are explained by Gnostic Gospel of Thomas 114 'Peter said "Let (Mary) go out from among us, for women are not worthy of the life (of being disciples)". Jesus answered "I will lead her ... in order that she too may become a living spirit (and) enter into the kingdom of heaven."' Compare the apocrypha text Dialogue of the Saviour 53 'Mary said ... these words ... as a woman who had understood completely' and Pistis Sophia 96 (Jesus is speaking) 'Mary Magdalene and John ... will surpass all my disciples'.

## Reflects Book of Thomas

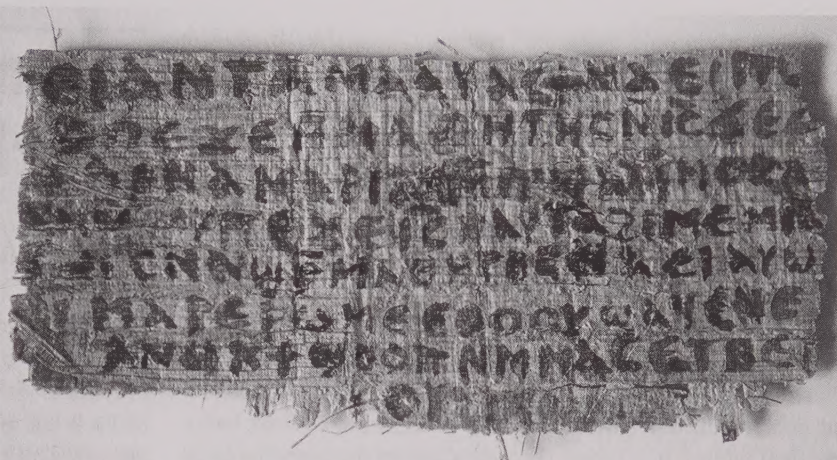
Fragment 11 'forth which' is again almost incomprehensible. But it is reasonable to surmise that what comes 'forth' is either light or its converse, darkness and evil. See the Book of Thomas 'when the light comes forth and hides the darkness, then the performance of each (archer) will be visible' and Gospel of Thomas 45 'an evil man brings forth evil things from his evil treasure'.

Fragment 8, 'an image', is, without context, ostensibly most difficult. But Philip says in a thanksgiving prayer (Gospel of Philip 26b) 'You who have united the perfect light with the Holy Spirit, unite the angels also with us, the images', which implies that human beings are, potentially, images of the divine. Compare Philip 61b '(Spiritual perfection) is when the image and the angel are united with one another', and Philip 72c '(Our flesh ...) is not true flesh, but an image of the true'.

Fragment 6, 'Let wicked people swell up', is no doubt part of an antithesis between evil/darkness and good/light, as I suggested might be the case with fragment 11. Compare Gospel of Bartholomew 4.67 'Jesus answered him: 'Bartholomew... there are some who are worthy of (these mysteries); but there are also others to whom they ought not to be entrusted, boasters, drunkards, the proud, the merciless, idolaters, seducers ... slanderers (and) teachers of falsehood'.

## Contrast physical imperfection and death

In the case of fragment 1 ('not [to] me, my mother gave to me li[fe]'), we again lack apparent wider context. But Gospel of Thomas 101, though itself defective, ('For my mother ... but [my] true [mother] gave me life'), points to a contrast between physical imperfection and death, on the one hand, and their opposites, spiritual perfection and life, on the other. We may compare the antitheses that I have suggested for fragments 11 and 6. The 'mother' of fragment 1 is thus not Mary, Jesus' physical mother, but rather his 'spiritual mother'. Compare the Gospel of Philip 6 'When we became Christians we obtained father and mother', In other words spiritual parents. We are left with fragments 4 and 7 ('Jesus said to them "my wife ..." and 'As for me, I dwell with her in order to ...') the former fragment has led to all the interest in this papyrus. And I think Prof King is ultimately misguided to suggest this fragment should not be taken as proof that Jesus was actually married. Whether by intention or accident, King casts her statement in misdirected form. No statement of fact in an ancient text is necessarily proof of that fact; it remains merely



The controversial fragment which may indicate that Jesus had a wife. Photo by Karen King

a statement, which, as we have seen, may be true or may be false. And in this case, I suggest, the statement is true.

But (fragment 7) Jesus continues to 'dwell with' his wife (Mary). Frustratingly, the explanation is lost in the papyrus as it survives. But there seem to me at least two clear reasons. Since – as we have seen already – 'Mary [was] a woman who had understood completely' (Dialogue of the Saviour 53), the circumstances of Gospel of Philip 61b then apply: 'when ... the man and his wife sit together ... the image and the angel are united with one another', i.e. spiritual perfection has been realised. Secondly, whatever the inadequacies of our physical earthly existence (on which see fragment 1 of this papyrus), which might lead, properly, to the situation enunciated in fragment G of the Gospel of the Egyptians, 'Jesus said [that] ... he who has not married should not marry', Jesus also, in the same fragment (perhaps speaking about himself?), comes to the definite conclusion that 'he who has married should not repudiate his wife'. For in exceptional cases the merely physical may actually cease from lacking holiness: 'The holy man is altogether holy, including his body ... Anything that he receives [he purifies]. And how [then] will he not purify the body also?' (Gospel of Philip 108).

It needs also to be noted that if, in saying in fragment G of the *Gospel of the Egyptians* 'he who has married should not repudiate his wife', Jesus is obliquely speaking about himself, then Prof King's papyrus is not, as claimed, the only surviving place where Jesus mentions his wife.

In sum, the new fragment bears all the hallmarks of originality and truth. It can be tied in closely with ideas provably emanating from a circle comprising Mary Magdalene, Mary, Jesus' mother, Thomas, Philip and Bartholomew – a circle of those closest to Jesus himself, a circle representing the innermost core of primitive Christianity. We should not, therefore, ask too many unjustified questions about this papyrus, or, through excessive caution and a misplaced dependence on the canon, undervalue it. Rather we should treasure it lovingly and abundantly for what it actually is: 'a pearl of great price'. I hope and expect eventual spectrometric analysis of the fragment to validate this.

Dr Martin Pulbrook is lay preacher at Blackpool Unitarian Church. For more information on Prof King's fragment see <http://hvr.d.me/OaZIDU>



# Let the Presbyterians claim chapel pub

Here's a trivia quiz question: 'Nollick Ghennal as Blein Vie Noa' means 'Merry Christmas and a Happy New Year', but in what language? I was pleased to receive this greeting from a Unitarian correspondent not too far away, and that's a clue.

\* \* \*

My grandson Billy was sad to miss taking part in the nativity play at his school this last year, having been stricken with the norovirus. He would, were he to meet her, receive a commendation for keeping away from schoolmates so as not to spread the virus, from none other than Rose George, writer on human health. Her book, *The Big Necessity: Adventures in the World of Human Waste*, is all about the unmentionable subject of excrement, our attitude towards it and how well or badly we deal with it. In a recent *Guardian* article she urged us to be more respectful of our microbiological adversaries. Bugs are now universal; they travel business and economy. "Health and safety has become a hackneyed joke (*mea culpa* JM) rather than the two greatest achievements of modern life," she claims, and "a fly, they say in Bangladesh, is more dangerous than a thousand tigers." That might make a good sermon illustration, or even a wayside pulpit.

\* \* \*

Good to see the smiling face of former Unitarian minister Jeremy Goring pop up the *Guardian's* 'Good to Meet You' column (8 December 2012). It's a weekly slot that introduces us to devotees of the paper who agree to be interviewed. He mentions his unitarian (small 'u') roots as well as his membership of "a relatively new spiritual movement based in Nigeria." This is presumably The Brotherhood of the Cross and Star, whose followers describe its founder leader Olumba Olumba Obu as being the Sole Spiritual Head of the Universe, and his son, also called Olumba Olumba Obu, is described as King of Kings and Lord of Lords. Jeremy continues as a reader of *The Inquirer*, however, and we have enjoyed his letters-page exchanges with Andrew Hill (keyboards at 20 paces) about the origins of the slogan 'Are you a Unitarian without knowing it?' He tells *Guardian* readers, "In the 1960s I sent in so many letters I was asked if I was planning to publish an anthology."

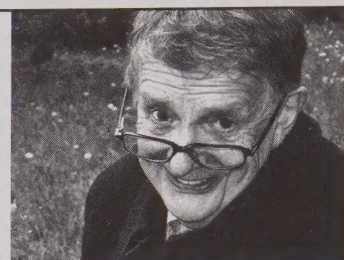
I hope Jeremy won't mind if I ponder aloud the thought prompted by a titbit that I remember from the memoirs of the renowned Malcolm Muggeridge (1903-1990), spicy journalist, sometimes acidic satirist and witty TV presenter, later a convert to Roman Catholicism. I met him once when I was a student and was assigned to pick him up at Piccadilly station when he came to speak to the Manchester University Theological Society. I was full of apprehension, knowing that he had no inhibitions about taking sideswipes at Unitarians. I later reviewed some of his books for *The Inquirer* and received a kindly letter of appreciation from him. My recollection is that Muggeridge was musing on the notion that he might have made some sort of career in the world of religion. Had he followed some such path, he would like to have been a monk renowned for his austerities. More likely, however, "some tiresome Unitarian, forever writing letters to the papers." (Sorry about that, Jeremy. Publish your anthology and I'll promise you a positive review.)

\* \* \*

Here's something of a moral dilemma. A colleague drew my attention to a further Unitarian titbit from the *Guardian* which

## Funny Old World

By  
John Midgley



he had spotted. It was in an article by Owen Hatherley, author of *A Guide to the New Ruins of Great Britain*. Headed, From Prayers to Pubs, it includes: "During a visit to Nottingham I had a drink in the Pitcher and Piano – or, as it was previously known, The High Pavement Chapel. The church was opened in 1876 for the use of the United Presbyterians." He describes the building as a "strong, gothic presence" and mentions the stained glass windows of captivating delicacy... "filled with personifications of various virtues (labour, theology, philanthropy etc.)" ... as well as "haunting war memorials." The dilemma is, should I inform Hatherley that he has got the denomination wrong? High Pavement was a Unitarian Chapel. I preached there as a student a time or two and on at least one occasion it was the venue for a GA Anniversary Service. My minister colleague told me he had resisted the impulse to send in a correction, preferring to let the United Presbyterians suffer the embarrassment of having a splendid building lost and transformed into a pub, which, the writer added, "for shock value, is best experienced on a Saturday night." Is this a sin of omission? Perhaps an appropriate penance might be a Saturday night visit there. It could be heart-breaking.

\* \* \*

Here's another trivia question: What is an incense-override? And did you get the language of the 'Merry Christmas and a Happy New Year' greeting in my first paragraph? It is in Manx, an ancient Gaelic language which is enjoying something of a revival. It came from Richard Banyard and his wife Margaret in Peel, on the Isle of Man which, I confess, I have never visited. Richard tells me he acts as Correspondence Secretary for the Manx Fellowship so gets all the Essex Hall mailings and takes *The Inquirer*. In the swinging '60s he lived at Unitarian College, then in Daisy Bank Road in Manchester, as a non-theological student. I and other fellow residents reckoned he was undertaking a PhD in 1960s pop music, as he had such an encyclopaedic knowledge of it. There being no active Unitarian congregation on the Isle of Man, he and Margaret attend the local Anglican Church and he tells me that on the recent occasion of the Cathedral's patronal festival (St German), the incense being wafted around the chancel set off the fire alarm in Peel fire station. The congregation emerged to be met in the porch by 'Pugh, Pugh, Barney McGrew, Cuthbert, Dibble and Grubb' (puppet firemen characters from the much-loved children's TV programme *Trumpton*, remember?) No one had remembered to set the 'incense-override' on the fire alarm system. Might we ever need such a device in any of our churches? Depends how New Age or Pagan the congregation has become, I suppose. Good to hear from Richard, who seems well settled on the island. Perhaps he can teach us to say, 'Are you a Unitarian without knowing it?' in Manx.

John Midgley is a retired Unitarian minister.



# International guests at annual meetings

By Derek McAuley

This year's General Assembly will have an international flavour. The Keynote speaker will be the Rev Dr Terasa Cooley, director of Congregational Life at the American Unitarian Universalist Association. We will also welcome Bálint Benczédi Ferenc, the Bishop of the Hungarian Unitarian Church, who is speaking at a workshop organised by the International Council of Unitarian Universalists (ICUU).

The Rev Dr Cooley will speak to a full plenary session and give a keynote address with the title of *Spiritual but not Religious: Opportunity or Threat?* She describes her theme:

'The British have long experienced and acknowledged what Americans are only now coming to terms with: that people experience their spiritual lives in a multitude of ways, only one of which is in congregations.

Changes in culture, generations and technology may be experienced as a threat to our institutional understandings of church, but there are also great opportunities for the liberal religious perspective of Unitarianism.'

The Rev Cooley will share some of the implications and opportunities that lie in our cultural transformations.

The Rev Cooley is a lifelong Unitarian Universalist, ordained in 1989, who has served congregations in Detroit, Chicago and Hartford, CT, and served as District Executive of the Massachusetts Bay District of the UUA. A native of Texas, she received her BA at the University of Texas at

Austin, her MDiv from Harvard Divinity School and her DMin from Hartford Seminary. Her primary research and presentation subjects are in the area of congregational health, conflict transformation, leadership development and strategic planning. You may follow her on Twitter at @LearnLoud or her blog at [terasacooley.com](http://terasacooley.com).

In partnership with the ICUU, it will be a great pleasure to have the Bishop of the Hungarian Unitarian Church, Bálint Benczédi Ferenc, at a General Assembly again. In 2012 the Transylvanian Unitarian Church and the Hungarian Unitarian Church re-established their historical unity under the name of the Hungarian Unitarian Church.

Bálint Benczédi Ferenc was born in Segesvár (Sighisoara) in 1952 and graduated from the Protestant Theological Institute in Kolozsvár in 1975.

After a two-year internship at the Unitarian congregation of Marosvásárhely (Targu-Mures), for almost 18 years he ministered to the Unitarian congregation of Désfalva. From 1979 he has been a member of the General Assembly and Executive Council. In 1993, he was elected minister at the 1st Unitarian congregation in Kolozsvár. In December 2008, the Synod in Fehéregyháza, elected him as the 31st bishop of the Transylvanian Unitarian Church.

Bishop Balint will talk about the renewal of Unitarianism since the fall of communism and the great progress the movement has made in re-establishing its identity to meet new challenges.

The Bishop will be accompanied by the Rev Maria Pap who will be known to many British Unitarians. She graduated from the Protestant Theological Institute in Kolozsvár in 1995; and in 1998-1999 she was the Sharpe Scholar, studying in Manchester and Oxford. In 2003-2004 she studied in Berkeley, California as the Balázs Scholar. Currently she is working at the headquarters of the Hungarian Unitarian Church in Kolozsvár, as secretary of the Bishops Office. Previously she has served two congregations for 17 years and in the last 8 years had been the dean of the Háromszék-Felsőfehér District.

**For more information on the annual meetings, contact Essex Hall (details on p2) or see: <http://bit.ly/HRa9Xd> Online registration is available until 21 February.**

*Derek McAuley is the chief officer of the Unitarian General Assembly.*



*Bálint Benczédi Ferenc, the Bishop of the Hungarian Unitarian Church*



*The Rev Dr Terasa Cooley, the director of Congregational Life at the UUA.*

## Charity Commission

Charities: The Florence Nightingale Home for Men, Barleycrofts Convalescent Home for Women, The Holiday Home, Great Hucklow, Charity for Rebuilding the Holiday Home, Great Hucklow and The Grundy Home for Convalescent Children (known together as The Unitarian Convalescent and Holiday Centre)

The Commission proposes to make a Scheme (a legal document) for these charities. The Scheme will amalgamate the charities and govern the charity created by it. A copy of the Scheme can be seen at <http://www.charitycommission.gov.uk/schemes/default.aspx> (If you cannot access this please call our contact centre on 0845 300 0218 or textphone 0845 300 0219).

Comments or representations on these proposals can be made to the Commission within one month from 2 February 2013 by completing the form on our website. Please quote 242256/349871.



# It is time to go to the promised land

In part 1 of his Channing lecture, published on 16 February, **David Usher** noted William Ellery Channing's wisdom in moving forward and leaving what was most comfortable. He compared that willingness to the Israelites' fears of leaving their enslaved lives in Egypt for the desert unknown. Here, he turns to Unitarians.

And it came to pass that the Unitarians found themselves in a strange and inhospitable land. Verily, hard times had fallen upon them. Their days of plenty had passed, and often did they look back with longing and regret. For once they were prosperous. Their numbers were plenty, and amongst themselves they counted some who were mighty and influential. The Unitarians of former times boasted of a vision for the world, and their arm was strong to make good that vision. They built temples large and proud, and into those temples flocked the great and the good. Unitarians were on an upward path, and expected to create a heaven upon this earth with their gospel of the oneness of God and the goodness of man.

But lo, for 100 years and more, the Unitarians found themselves in sad servitude to decay. Their numbers dwindled. Many of their temples fell into disrepair and disuse, and were now emporia for antique furniture or other uses of Mammon. But the Unitarians clung to preaching the same truths which had been so powerful in days of yore.

Whereas they once fell on grateful ears, now were they scorned by the rabble who preferred the charms of cathedrals of consumerism. The Unitarians knew not what to do. "It cannot be that there is anything wrong with us," they sighed. "We are the bastions of truth and freedom," they whispered to themselves. "It is the fault of the godless amongst whom we are cast that we do not prosper. We are in a strange land which does not appreciate our precious gospel." And to comfort themselves, the Unitarians told the stories of past times, and invoked the names of Unitarians much hallowed for the stoutness of their hearts and the rigour of their minds. Yea, some of yore had gone fearless unto death in the name of their faith. But the Unitarians of the present day did quake if so much as a feather fell upon their door.

And so did the Unitarians withdraw into themselves. Their numbers did shrink. They sought comfort in the thought that it was not that they were dying, but that they were the elite. "We are too good for this world," they said. They complained that the world would not listen. But they never said anything the world wanted to hear. And what little they did say, they said quietly, for they greatly feared to make a fuss. "We must not upset anyone," they nodded to themselves. "For more important than all else is that we be nice."

Deep in their hearts they knew all was not well. They dreamed of the promised land seen by their forefathers; the



*London District Minister the Rev David Usher believes it is time for Unitarians to go to the Promised Land. Essex Hall photo*

land in which their temples would be filled, in which their good works would be abundant and effective, in which their voice would be heralded. And, some of them spake out to the huddled few. 'We must not allow ourselves to die,' they cried. 'We have something precious, but it is not ours alone. We must share it.' They proclaimed that a Promised Land awaited them. 'We must leave this strange and inhospitable land,' said the fearless few, 'and go to a new land of milk and honey. The journey will be difficult, but great rejoicing there will be on arrival. As our ancestors were brave, so shall we be.' Thus did the cry go up.

And so the Unitarians appointed a Committee of Elders to lead them to the promised land. And the Elders met while the people waited to be told what direction they might follow.

'But first,' said the Elders, 'we must prepare the ground. There must be a Great Consultation. For we must not go to the Promised Land if there are some who prefer to remain behind. We must take our oblation to the Altar of Consensus. We must go together or not at all. We are too few to leave any behind. We can travel only as fast and as far as the weakest among us.'

And so was a Great Consultation set up, and were the energies of many consumed. It took many years and it cost much of the Unitarians' treasure of silver and gold.

And by the time the consultation produced The Document, there were fewer Unitarians, for many had died and many had lost patience, despaired and gone elsewhere. But at the end of the years of labour was there indeed a fine Document. And all marvelled at its fineness. Excellent was its grammar and syntax. The binding was of the best quality. The Document was carried into the Assembly to the sound of trumpets, and there was much rejoicing and Votes of Thanks. And the Document was put in the place of honour amongst many other such documents. No-one read it because it was too holy and demanded too much. But the Document was proof that Unitarians wanted

*(Continued on next page)*



# Documents do not drive us forward



Worship can be inspiring even when there are few attenders. Essex Hall photo

*(Continued from previous page)*

to go to the Promised Land. For certainly, they talked about it enough. But action there was not. Movement there was not. The Unitarians remained in the strange land and smaller and feebler did they become.

But still there was a small, unruly, unsatisfied element amongst the Unitarians. The Document left them unfulfilled. 'We have the Document,' they cried, 'but we remain stuck in this land of inertia. We must not remain in our near-empty temples and await our end. We have a vision. Let us make it so.'

But the Committee of Elders did protest. 'Do not say we care not for the Promised Land,' they scolded. 'For did we not commission The Document?'

And some women of the Unitarians did protest. 'We cannot go now to the Promised Land,' said they. 'For it would upset our traditions. We are few and weary, yet have we taken some small comfort here, and we have organised a raffle and the drawing for the prizes is not yet. And we shall die soon anyway, and we would prefer to die in the sure comforts of the past than to live in the uncertainties of the future.'

And they did throw stones at the restless trouble-makers, and did call them names. And the trouble-makers were shunned.

And the Elders were glad that all was as it was. They had produced the Document. And they got to sit at the High Table, and they presented themselves with special badges to show they were indeed the Elders. And the Elders read minutes of meetings at which they decided nothing, and they visited the emptying temples and they set up commissions and panels to let the people know that they were the Elders and great was their power.

And the Elders presided over the slow death of the Unitar-

ians who remained in the strange land. But there ceased to be the noise of wailing or gnashing of teeth. For verily, most Unitarians were aged, and few had teeth, and they had agreed that their temples existed to be places of comfort for themselves. And the young few were told that they had to conform. The young were told, just wait and when you are aged, you will understand the importance of comfort and you will be content.

And so it came to pass that the Unitarians remained in their strange land of scarcity, and slowly did they fall away. One by one did they close their temples. One by one did the elderly die and did the young give up hope that they would ever journey to the Promised Land. And at the last, there was no-one to mourn the passing of the Unitarians.

Many years after the last Unitarian died, and all the temples closed, an archaeologist entered the sacred courts of Essex Hall and there found the Document. How can it be, did the archaeologist think, that the Unitarians were so committed to journeying to the Promised Land, yet remained inert? Verily, he did say, the writing of a Document about the Promised Land is not the same as making the journey.

Here is what I believe is the state of Unitarianism in the United Kingdom today.

I believe today, as I have believed all my life, that at its best, Unitarianism offers the best religious news on the block. There is nothing else I would rather be, when we are at our best.

We offer stimulation for the mind; we challenge people to think about their faith. We actively encourage people to doubt and be sceptical – not to accept things someone else has told them, but to test all against the reality of their own experience and the integrity of their own conscience. We do not demand a slavish dogmatic obedience. We do not insist upon credu-

*(Continued on next page)*



# Words are not enough for worship

*(Continued from previous page)*

lity for doctrines which our modern, scientifically informed minds tell us cannot be true as fact – however appealing or enlightening they might be as myth. It is not that we are any more intelligent than those of other faiths, but we are people for whom the use of reason is an integral part of intelligent faith. We want our faith to be relevant to the world as it is, not to the world as others have wished it to be.

We offer stimulation for the heart. Love and compassion would be our guiding principles, not a rigid imposition of the judgments of law. If judged by who we are as religious people, let it be of how we live in practice, not what we profess in theory. We challenge ourselves to know no boundaries to our love or to our encouragement to human aspiration – no boundaries of gender or affectional orientation, of age or race, physical ability or nationality. We offer challenge to the hands, that they should labour for others, doing the work of justice and the witnessing for what is right and true.

## We are seldom at our best

All of that we have done since people have gathered under the banner of Unitarianism – when we are at our best. But here is the sad but honest truth. We are seldom at our best. We seldom live up to our own high ideals. We seldom do what it says on the tin. We have allowed ourselves to become smug in the self-congratulation that our message is the best, yet we have abandoned the mission to share that message. We have told ourselves that we are a club – a rather exclusive one – gathering only for the benefit of ourselves.

As London District Minister, I visit one or more of our congregations most Sundays and that can be both an inspiring and a dispiriting experience. It is not only a matter of numbers, though I do believe that numbers are important. Numbers are not an abstraction. Numbers are people, and we are morally bound to reach out to as many as possible with what we offer. *We are morally bound to do so.* So, the more people in the pews, the more people whose lives are enriched by this life-giving, life-enriching faith.

But it is not just numbers. As Paul Parker, the Quaker who gave such a fine address at the 2012 General Assembly Annual Meetings said, there are congregations of 10 people, who are depressed and depressing to any newcomers. And there are congregations of 10 people who are filled with the spirit of faithfulness and are attractive to newcomers.

We are clinging to what we love, though it no longer serves us, and we remain unwilling to let it go even though unless we let it go, we will be unable to serve our own higher purpose. William Ellery Channing had to let go of his desire to belong to The Church Universal in order for American Unitarianism to be born. He had to abandon his pastoral wish not to upset anyone, especially those with power over him, to be true to his prophetic obligation.

We say we want the promised land of future Unitarian prosperity, but we refuse to unshackle ourselves from servitude to the past. We know the past. We know the present. We do not know the future, and we fear what we do not know.

We cling to old forms, old customs, because their familiarity comforts us. They suit us, and we prefer to do what suits us, even though the world is telling us it does not suit them.

Here is a question: How many of you have attended a dif-

ferent denomination's worship service, a congregation which is packing them in? This is my most recent experience. Let me say, the theology underpinning the service left me cold. It appalled me. But leave aside the theology. As an experience, the worship was fantastic. The music was lively, engaging, and sung with energy and passion. No hymn books, to look down at and mumble, but words projected on big screens, requiring people to look up and sing out. Easy, catchy tunes, not cerebral music impossible to sing. The preaching was energetic, it was full of stories, vivid illustrations. It spoke to the heart. Theologically, I was squirming in my seat. But the worship, as an experience, was uplifting, inspiring, inviting.

By comparison, our worship is too often abstruse and unengaging. Let us assume the theology of our worship is always relevant and rational. But the way we present our message is, too often, simply dreadful. Words, words, words, words – as if that's the only way to communicate. We use readings which are powerful when read to oneself, but when spoken at 100 miles-an-hour, become unintelligible.

Too often our worship shows off how smart and well-read the person in the pulpit is, instead of speaking to the human condition of the person in the pew. Do we use visuals, props? No. We choose music as if nothing of sacred value has been written since Johann Sebastian was in his pomp. In short, we are a Rolls Royce engine in the body of an old Morris Minor. Flash packaging might disguise a false product, but drab packaging does not ensure a true product. Many people won't even try the product, because the packaging has already turned them away.

Theologically, spiritually, I continue to believe Unitarianism is the faith of the present and the future. Yet we are stuck in the past. We say we are open to new truths and, perhaps theologically we are. Yet we shun the new truths of how to engage, how to be meaningful and relevant to the present day.

I am as drawn to the past as anyone, because I know where I am with the past. I grew up, in the 1950s and '60s in a Unitarian congregation which was a wonderful part of my childhood. But that was a different world, and what suited me then does not suit young people today. Life has changed.

## Time to move on

So, this is my call. As the Israelites had to abandon the comforts and assurances of the life they knew in Egypt to find the promised land even though the way was uncertain and fraught. And, as Channing had to abandon something he long held dear, something which he did not want let go, so too must we. We cannot delude ourselves that we pine for the promised land if we are not prepared to move on. And we cannot create something with new life if we cling to what is no longer congenial to our condition.

No doubt, if we set out, there will be those who will complain. There will be those who resist. There will be those who like things well enough as they are, and are only interested in their own comfort and pleasure. But Unitarianism is too good, too true, too full of promise to wither on the vine of our own timidity. We owe it to our own best past. More – we owe it to our own best future.

*The Rev Dr David Usher is District Minister for Unitarians in London & the South East. This is Part 2 of a transcript of his William Ellery Channing lecture.*



# UMS had a wonderful weekend

By Elly Brookfield

As the summer drew to a close, the Unitarian Music Society came from all over the country to share music and friendship at the Nightingale Centre, Great Hucklow. Gilbert and Sullivan was our weekend's inspiration, as our main focus was *Trial by Jury*. Many rehearsals were spent trying to perfect the work for both the choir and orchestra, but the rehearsals were inspired both by Nick Morrice's talk and by the videos of other companies performing our main work. On the Sunday night, everyone's spirits were high and dare I say we were raring to perform to our massive audience of... four! The choir sounded sweetly, and the orchestra played beautifully, consisting of violins, cellos, double bass, clarinets, French horn and piano. We also worked in three singing groups, which was extremely fun. The group that I was in, sang some lovely good old-fashioned Rutter, which you can't beat! The shock of the weekend for me was that I had to sing soprano, and when you're an alto, reaching a top A is an impossible task!

Other short courses and events were held throughout the weekend and one of my highlights was the dance workshop, which was led by Dawn Buckle. My stereotypical teenage brain on an early Saturday morning was dubious about dancing but once we began, everyone was full of energy and I think David Dawson has found a new career as a dancer if he ever needs it! Everyone enjoyed the session as we had to work as a group; it provided a great sense of achievement when we managed to choreograph a dance by ourselves. On this weekend, I have never laughed so much at a concert, which was put on by the musicians. Although there were some great musicians who performed great pieces, there was a great comedic influence with people not finding the correct music and a comedic song about smiling, followed by one about death. One of my favourite sights was the expression on those faces who had just been told by Josh Johnston that he didn't need music to accompany them. I think the look can only be described as half-shocked

## Meditational Fellowship plans meeting

Last November the Meditational Fellowship met in Warminster at the delightful Ivy House Retreat Centre for a wonderful weekend with Richard Bober who took over from Rev David Monk who founded the fellowship about 26 years ago and ran it almost until his death. We had a varied programme with Meditation sessions, Teaching, Chanting, Circle Dancing, an inspiring Sunday service and two epilogues, wonderful food and above all *fellowship*. Who could forget the walking Meditation in the glorious garden on a mild November day? And there is always a time for our contributions of poems, music and so on and any questions. So why not join us on Friday 10 May (4.30) until Sunday 12 May (4.30) The total cost this year is £116 Believe me this is cheap compared to many venues. A deposit of £50 is needed by March 30th and the balance by April 15th. Late bookings are not encouraged though they do happen. Unfortunately the centre is not disabled friendly with only two downstairs rooms and steps everywhere. Warminster railway station is not far from the centre. Do contact me on 0238 0555333 or [brenda.knopf@btinternet.com](mailto:brenda.knopf@btinternet.com) to get an application form.

— Brenda Knopf



There was lots of fun and music at the Unitarian Music Society weekend. Photo by John Hewerdine

and half-frightened, although they had no reason to be! UMS took part in the service at the Old Chapel, Great Hucklow, led by Roy Wain, an inspiring service about the Unitarian transcendentalists. In the service, the choir sang a beautiful Hungarian hymn and also sang the first preview of David Dawson's new anthem, 'Let This be a House of Peace.'

I find the Nightingale Centre to be a great place to come to, as it is peaceful in the countryside, has great food, but also it holds fond memories of being here from past youth events and now I have memories of a great musical weekend too! Next year, we hope to encourage as many young people as we can to come along, as FDA is straight before UMS next year (9 - 12 August). So I look forward to next year and hope it is as brilliant as the weekend we have just had!

Membership of UMS is free to youth under 18. See: <http://www.unitarianmusic.org.uk/>

Elly Brookfield is a Sixth Form student and Member of New Chapel, Denton.



During the summer a new memorial to Joseph Priestley (1733-1804) was unveiled on the main road into Birstall, West Yorkshire. Photo by Jim Birch

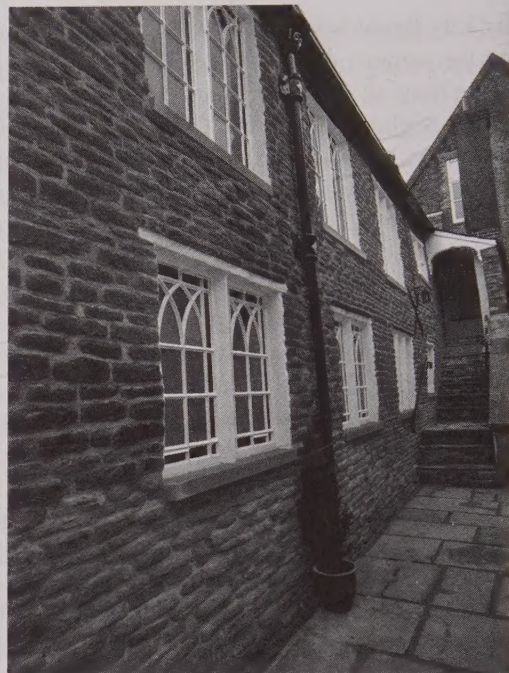
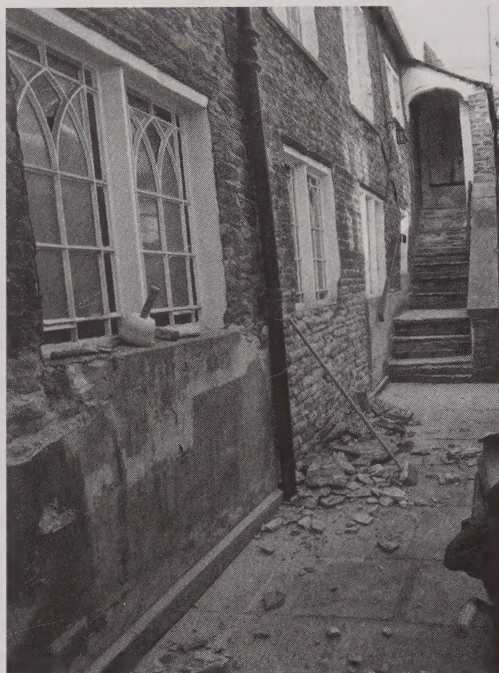


# Macclesfield chapel re-opens beautifully

The restoration work on King Edward Street Chapel in Macclesfield has been completed and we gathered for our first service on 9 December after nine weeks away from our Chapel home. We keep asking ourselves how long it will be before we walk through the Chapel gates and stop saying 'Wow'! The Chapel looks beautiful.

I would like to thank all the congregations who supported us and sent donations for the restoration work in addition to the Gregson Trust and the Manchester District Association. The number of churches who contributed was heart-warming.

We now have a beautifully restored chapel. The combination of our Unitarian witness and the custodianship of a Grade II\* listed building is a rich mix. We have much to offer the people in our town. Our next task is – at long last – to convert our tiny vestry into a kitchen. We had to close the chapel for eight weeks and two groups, AA and the Quakers, had to find alternative accommodation for that period. The sad fact is that once those groups experienced a building with an indoor toilet, a kitchen and enough space to sit in the round they have decided not to return to the chapel. So, in an instant, we lost £1500 per annum income. So, much as we love our beautiful building and would like to relax and enjoy it for a while, we now have to explore the possibility of getting a kitchen installed and moving a few



*Before and after: King Edward Street Chapel reopened following eight weeks of refurbishment. The Grade 2\*-listed building now needs a kitchen. Photos by Stephanie Ramage*

pews about so that the space offers more than sitting in rows. We are thrilled with our chapel but cannot sit back and enjoy it without being mindful of the pressing need to continue to raise funds. I am sure many of you reading this will understand, exactly, our dilemma. But, we have much to look forward to. Our minister, the Rev Michael Dadson who has been with us for 8 years, is renewing his contract with us. We are holding a service on Sunday 17 February to celebrate the past and renew our hope and commitment to the future.

*– Stephanie Ramage*

## Sale of church benefits ministry



The closure of Pudsey Unitarian Church in 2011 was a sad event. However the building has been sold and on 19 January, under a portrait of Joseph Priestley hanging at Mill Hill Chapel, Leeds, Janet and Colin Gadsby handed a cheque for £133,000 to David Dawson as president of the Yorkshire Unitarian Union. It will be deployed, as the Pudsey congregation wished, in supporting ministry and sustaining the development of the Unitarian cause in the area of the Yorkshire Unitarian Union. Photo by Kate Taylor

Get the news first

Subscribe to The Inquirer!

[www.inquirer.org.uk](http://www.inquirer.org.uk)

## Lay Leader Vacancy

East Midlands Unitarians are looking for a lay-person to provide leadership and support to their congregations. The post will be full-time and based at the Derby Unitarian Chapel. The initial appointment will be for three years.

### Further details and applications

District Secretary Rev Dr Arthur Stewart

11 Herrick Close, Sileby LE12 7RL

Email: [arthurstewart@live.co.uk](mailto:arthurstewart@live.co.uk)

Closing date 1 March